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Interview: Ralph Morrow

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INTERVIEW WITH RALPH MORROW

by Dr. Joseph Watras

September 21, 1990

JW: Well, anyway, I found out about it and I talked to Gordon Price and he said he didn't have any more of the records and he sent me down to the church. I actually found things in a janitor's closet, sort of stuck to one side.

RM: It was a great undertaking. We all had sort of the same idea about the same time that we wanted it. I guess you determined that they were liberals.

JW: They all lived in Dayton view, I think.

RM: Well, no they didn't. Phyllis Andrews is my sister-in-law, and her former husband lived in Oakwood. A couple of other people, which I can't recall. Jack _____, Dick Brown, Jackie _____; I'm trying to remember who all the people were. It was 20 years ago.

JW: It was a reaction to the problems of the Dayton City Schools.

RM: It was not necessarily the problems in the city schools, but we were liberals living in Dayton View, believing in integration and wanted to eliminate that from our problems from when we were sending our little children off to school. At that time I had two children but they were like one or two years old, or something like that. We just all believed in integration at that time and wanted our children to have the benefit of that type of education and thought it was providing a service for the city. We had no idea what we were going to end up with, but we tried

to form a school starting with Kindergarten through sixth and we had, I think, visions that it would go even beyond that. Which it did.

JW: You ended up with \$100,000 from the Rike Foundation. In its beginnings you had \$20,000, I think.

RM: Gordon was the money _____. He knew how to get that \$100,000. _____ We had to work to get the money. But we weren't a fabulously wealthy school, but we seemed to be successful in raising it off the ground. Of course, we had the building. Not all of us were members of Christ Episcopal, but most of us were. We knew that that's what _____; we had the space.

JW: I think the Planning Committee resigned and allowed another committee to take over with people on the outside.

RM: That was part of a big mistake.

JW: Really.

RM: I think so. As somebody who came on and said later, "You can only go through this birth once." And this comes from someone who has not gone through the _____ and didn't have the enthusiasm that the rest of us had. We were very confused and would do anything to make it succeed. Some of the people who came on later and ended up running it, weren't that enthused at all. I think after we had gone through that for a couple of years, we started bringing people back that were there in the beginning. I became president of the board for a good while. It seemed like a good while - for _____ years. We started as a real _____ operation and ended up a little bit more than that.

JW: I wondered if you were going to be able to meet with me because of those problems last night.

RM: I didn't know what it was until 30 minutes ago. I just know that I didn't get my paper this morning.

JW: I called around apologetically _____.

RM: What are you looking for? What do you want me...?

JW: Oh, what I'm trying to get is a sense of what went through the schools and why it succeeded and why it didn't succeed. It seemed that in the first four years, until 1976, that Lois Hyman, the principal headmaster was the school.

RM: I think that's probably true. She was a very dynamic headmaster. She was right in step with those of us that founded it, I thought.

JW: She seemed to speak of two commitments; that is, one was the notion of integrated education and the other was the individually guided, or non-graded, education.

RM: That's correct. What's the guy's name who was superintendent of schools at that time?

JW: Carle, Wayne Carle.

RM: We all were Wayne Carle followers. We all believed in what he was doing. He was trying then and we could see that, whatever committee it was...

JW: Serving Our Schools.

RM: Thank you. It's been so long since I thought about any of this. When SOS was coming in to the fore, a bunch of us had worked on school campaigns. We tried to elect people for the school board, with CBS (Citizens for

Better Schools.) We were all involved in that, too. Or, at least, the forefather of that. We were for Wayne Carle and he was for us. He knew what we were doing. Gordon and he were friends, I gather. And I believe that they discussed all this beforehand. We wanted to have what he was promoting.

JW: So this really was an experiment?

RM: We could do it like a laboratory where he didn't have to worry about a school board that was against him. Maybe a city that was against him. But we could do it. I think we taught 22 children in the first class that first year.

JW: Initially, you aimed for 100 but you didn't get that.

RM: Not even close.

JW: There was not a lot of money for the teachers' salary - \$6,500.

RM: Back then none of those teachers could have made more and they were given so much freedom. And they were buying into a concept, too.

JW: It was a multi-cultured staff. One was born in Germany, one was oriental, there was a black woman from New Jersey. What was her name?

RM: I talked to Fannie Porter a year or two ago, who was a teacher there. I was president when Lois Hyman was headmaster. And she and I worked well together and believed in the same things.

JW: She seems to have worked well with everybody.

RM: She was leaving the city and so we had a big search and hired - what was his name?

JW: Charles somebody.

RM: The guy that we hired did not work out at all.

JW: You should have fired the search committee.

RM: I think what happened with the search committee, it was down to 2 and we brought the 2 finalists, they were both from out of town, and the day that we brought the other guy in we learned some things about him that made us certain that we didn't want to hire him. And so we were left with one survivor instead of a choice. And then we had this guy and it didn't work.

JW: He lasted 3 months, I believe.

RM: It didn't work. It didn't take long, maybe a day. The first day of school, I hadn't thought about this for a long time, but they were going...I was not president of the school board, Kathy Brown was. It was very painful and Kathy Brown went through a lot of pain. Then we brought in Bob Hoover, who had been retired. He did a nice job. By that time I had children in the school, but my children...I remarried in 1978 and we moved in early 1979. I think I took my kids out of school after the first semester in 1979. By that time I was not on the board anymore. So I really lost contact and was not involved at all when it closed.

JW: They had a new headmaster then, Arlene Brown.

RM: I never met her.

JW: Ostensibly they closed for declining enrollment and increasing expenses. I guess they did a survey and got parents involved and got lukewarm support. I guess you had a lot of volunteer support. It seems to me that parents had to be involved for 20 hours, or some mounted time. At any rate, they were dedicated to the ongoing school in those early years.

RM: I don't remember that at all. My children would have gone into school around 1975 maybe. I don't remember any of that. I know I took on a lot of problems. When we founded it we were working long hours almost every day and every night. A lot of meetings. We had a lot of talented people, I thought. I recall, anyway, in putting it all together. They said we couldn't get certified and in four years...

JW: In 1973 you were certified.

RM: We worked with Tony Hall and he helped us a lot, as I recall. The people who started there and put their children in our care were enthusiastic and also I think they wanted to be involved to make sure that this was a legitimate school. I made friendships with people at that time that I still have. It was a good time.

JW: One of the differences between the school early and then later on, was the change in emphasis. That is, when it began there were two goals.

RM: I guess maybe we weren't needed when it was all over.

JW: Because the Dayton schools were already desegregated.

RM: Yes. By the time that my wife and I moved, and she had not been _____; she was from another city; but at that point our question was about the quality of the school. It wasn't about anything else. Are Molly and Joshua getting an education here? Do we want to put Rob down at _____? And we decided that we were going to put them in Longfellow to start with, which was an awfully good elementary school at that time in the city. When we moved, we put them all in the Trotwood schools because we lived right by the grade school. There wasn't, I felt, no big compelling need to keep my children there. That they were going to get a fabulous education there. I think they received an adequate, good education. I don't think it was outstanding, maybe it was better than they would have received in the public schools. I hope it was.

JW: Do you think it had the effect of being the laboratory, the example that you wanted it to be, in support of Wayne Carle?

RM: No, probably not. I think we started with 22 or 23, you say it was more than that. But I think it was 22 or 23; I have a picture of them somewhere. But it's hard...We were talking about how integrated we wanted to be. We wanted to ^{do} this. We wanted to do that. If you only have 20-some children interested whose parents are interested in your school, that is enough. If people were trying to bang down the doors, then we could have been very selective. I think we refused admittance to one child, maybe, during the time

of the school. Because we had problems that we were not equipped to handle. I know that was a big thing for discussion.

JW: If you had to do it over again, do you think it would be wise to have at least started and tried what you had tried?

RM: Oh, I definitely think it was wise. Knowing where I was at that time and where the city was at that time, it was a lot of fun. I don't know of any reason why I wouldn't do it.

JW: If I was from another city and our city was going to go through the same kinds of desegregation controversy that Dayton went through, and I came to you for suggestions to avoid problems, what would you tell me?

RM: I hadn't thought about that for a long time. My children are all in college now. I don't know. They wanted to start up a school, I'd have to think about some of the things we tried to put together and things that were necessary. Money obviously is. A good principal, headmaster, whatever you want to call you leader, is. A very enthusiastic board is necessary. It's necessary to have a bus.

JW: Oh, having a bus was a problem, wasn't it?

RM: Well, transportation was a problem. We got a bus from the city. My children wanted a bus. But we were all working parents. We knew early on that a half-day kindergarten was not the answer, because there was no one at home the second part of the day. So we had a full-day kindergarten, but there were two halves. You could do

just half of it if you wanted to at a reduced rate. That was another thing that came into _____. Then a lot of us, Dick and Diane Brown, Kathy and Tom Brown, and I all shared in our car pools to pick them up in the afternoons and take them to their homes.

JW: I know there was a big controversy with that the private schools weakened the public schools. And you said that you began as an example.

RM: Well, we certainly weren't weakened. We got much more publicity than we deserved, for sure.

JW: That's good.

RM: I don't think it weakened it at that point. The Catholic schools may have, I don't know.

JW: I thank you for taking this time to talk with me.

RM: You're welcome. I don't know if there is anything more I can tell you.